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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7280  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 000813

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/25/2018  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: YOUNG RUSSIA TAKES AIM AT CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY

REF: A. 07 MOSCOW 1780  
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 747

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Despite a ruling by the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) that the GOR should "correct" the situation faced by the un-registered Moscow branch of the Church of Scientology in Russia (COS), the COS has been under investigation by the Ministry of Internal Affairs since November 2007 and learned March 11 that it was again refused registration in Moscow. The COS also has become the object of an attack by the pro-Kremlin youth movement "Young Russia" led by its chairman and State Duma deputy Maksim Mishenko. In response, the COS has asked the Duma to investigate Mishenko's statements as hate speech, which is punishable by law. The number of COS groups operating throughout Russia rose to 59, up from 45 in April [1](#)2007. End Summary.

Pyrrhic Victory in Strasbourg; Harassment in Moscow  
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[1](#)2. (C) On March 11, lawyers for the Moscow branch of the COS learned that the local branch of the Federal Registration Service (part of the Ministry of Justice) had again refused to register it as a religious organization. On September 24, 2007, the ECHR confirmed its April 5, 2007 decision that the GOR had improperly denied the Moscow branch of the COS registration under Russia's 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations (ref a). In its decision, the ECHR ordered the GOR to pay the COS 25,000 euros, but did not order Russian authorities to register the COS as a religious organization, opting instead for ambiguous language that the GOR should "correct" the situation. Natalya Alekseyeva, a representative of the Moscow branch of the COS responsible for social questions, told us that while the COS has received payment of the 25,000 euros in compensation ordered by the ECHR, in November 2007 various agencies under the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs began to investigate the activities of the COS. The COS has not yet decided on its next course of action.

Young Russia Jumps on Bandwagon  
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[1](#)3. (C) On March 21, several hundred members from Young Russia (a pro-Kremlin youth group created in April 2005), held a rally near the campus of Moscow's Bauman State Technical University to demand that authorities shut down COS Moscow. After the brief rally, a group of students, including Mishenko, tried to enter the nearby building housing the Moscow church but were not allowed in by the building's guards. Bad blood between the two groups goes back to November 2007, when Mishenko, the head of Young Russia, issued a statement that referred to the COS as a "sect," and stated that Young Russia wanted the church to

move from its rented space near the university. (NOTE: The Moscow COS church is located adjacent to the university and Alekseyeva says that it has had a good relationship with its rector. According to her, students from the university sometimes attend COS-sponsored concerts and other events held at locations outside the university grounds. The COS may have brought some unwanted attention upon itself in May 2007, when several of its members met on their own initiative with the deputy head of Young Russia to discuss COS youth programs. END NOTE).

14. (C) Alekseyeva said that Mishenko continued to make such statements even after he was elected to the State Duma from the United Russia party list. Mishenko recently stated publicly that after the March 2 presidential elections it became clear that the U.S. would not try to foment an "orange revolution" and that the group was now free to resolve one of the problems facing Russia, namely the "sect of Scientology."

In response, the COS has asked the Duma to investigate Mishenko's statements as hate speech and as a possible ethics violation. According to Alekseyeva, on March 11, the Duma Committee on Mandates and Deputies' Ethics sent Mishenko an official inquiry. On March 11, the Duma's Committee on Mandates and Deputies' Ethics reportedly sent Mishenko an official inquiry to which he must respond in thirty days. Alekseyeva said that Mishenko has treated the inquiry as a badge of honor, and had even posted it on the Young Russia website. The only COS-related posting we could find on Young Russia's website concerned the March 21 protest which condemned the COS as an "American totalitarian sect." According to the Young Russia website 700 students and faculty participated; Alekseyeva said the number was only 200.

15. (C) The most senior of Russia's human rights defenders, Moscow Helsinki Group Chairwoman Lyudmila Alekseyeva, told EUR DAS David Kramer on March 16 that the COS had complained to her of an increase in pressure against it throughout Russia (ref b). The COS representative did not mention such problems in any of our meetings with her. On the contrary, she said that the COS now has 59 groups operating throughout Russia, up from 45 in April 2007. She was worried, however, that the recent adverse publicity by Young Russia will convince COS's landlord to decide not to renew its lease for the Moscow center when it expires at the end of March.

#### COMMENT

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16. (C) Like the other Kremlin-spawned youth group Nashi, Young Russia now appears to be being kept at arms' length by the Presidential Administration that created it and Mishenko's campaign, while no doubt irritating, has not to date gathered momentum, or received much play in the press.  
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